

# Children as Citizens: Not on Campus

**Louise Phillips**

University of Southern Queensland

Most Australian universities have a policy that stipulates responsibilities and protocol for situations when children are on campus. In recent times children have begun to be seen as possessing rights to participation in society. Ideas of children as citizens, that is, as active members of the public sphere, have been theorised, discussed and investigated. University campuses have also been defined as sites of citizenship (e.g. Harkavy, 2006). This paper examines the positioning of children as citizens on university campuses through analysis of how children are defined in children on campus policies from three Australian universities. Poststructuralist readings make visible irony at play, and a case is argued for the reworking of children on campus policies to be built on language that positions children as welcome participants of universities as democratic sites.

At most Australian universities, approval for children to enter a campus needs to be sought beforehand. The existence of a 'children on campus' policy was brought to my attention when I visited campus as a doctoral student with two of my children without seeking prior approval. Children do not require approval before entering most other social spaces aside from chambers of parliament. For example, in 2009 Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young had her two-year-old child removed from the parliamentary chamber by a President of the Senate ruling (Rodrigues, 2009). The underlying premise for 'children on campus' policies is university legal responsibility for the health and safety of all people on site. This paper examines how deficit views of children in 'children on campus' policies impinge on children's inclusion and participation at university campuses as social spaces and in turn discriminate against staff and students with children.

Children have been defined and understood in numerous ways throughout history and across cultures. The concept of childhood is a relatively recent construction (Aries, 1962; DeMause, 1976) and is generally agreed to have developed with the establishment of schooling for children (Postman, 1982/1994; Luke,

1989). Aries argues that modern times have witnessed a widening separation between children and adults. In western societies, children are typically seen to belong to the 'private worlds of play, domesticity and school' (Roche, 1999, p. 479), whereas adults have full access to all domains of society. Social policy on, for, or about children typically focuses on protection, thereby supporting this seclusion of children to private worlds (Woodhead, 1997; Wyness, 2000).

Theories of childhood inform the ways that people think about children and speak and interact with them. James, Jencks and Prout (1998) refer to varying concepts of childhood as theoretical models of childhood and identify two categories: presociological and sociological.

The identification of presociological and sociological categories signalled a distinction between earlier theories of children from disciplines other than sociology and contemporary sociological theories. Presociological theories of children and childhood were drawn from disciplines such as philosophy and psychology, which view children in terms of becoming adults. Sociological theories of children and childhood developed over recent decades acknowledge children

as agentic in the here and now. These two distinctly different theoretical views of children shape notions of children's citizenship as either a future status or as a current status respectively.

Presociological theoretical models of children identified by James *et al.* (1998) include: the evil child, the immanent child, the innocent child, the naturally developing child, and the unconscious child. While this is not a definitive list of the ways of viewing children, these five major presociological theories have informed and continue to inform conceptions about children and adult interactions with children from the 1600s to the present. These models were shaped by theories that do not acknowledge the social context and 'have become part of conventional wisdom surrounding the child' (James *et al.*, 1998 p. 3). These theories continue to influence possibilities for children's citizenship.

The theoretical models of children as evil and impulsive are most relevant to this paper. A theoretical model of children as evil rests on a view of children as demonic, which 'finds its lasting mythological foundation in the doctrine of Adamic original sin' (James *et al.*, 1998, p. 10). The Christian *Old Testament* and the theories of philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1660/1996) shaped the thinking that children are born evil, so much so that adults beat the evil out through discipline and control. Children are seen to be wilful with potential to disturb adult social order. The classic literary work *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954) portrays a cautionary tale of children descending to barbaric acts in the absence of adult discipline and control. Such a view of children actively denies children exercising positive constructive agency.

A theoretical model of children as unconscious was shaped by psychoanalytic theorists, such as Freud (1923). To Freud, childhood was seen as a time of impulsivity. Children viewed according to this theoretical model are highly ego-focused; consciousness and therefore consideration of others is minimal. Adults have the role of managing children's free expressions of instincts and impulses with the purpose of integrating them into the adult world. This view of children as impulsive and/or irrational has been identified by Arneil (2002), Kulnych (2001), and Stasiulis (2002) as an argument used against children's recognition and participation as citizens. The prevalence of views of children as negatively impulsive actively impinges possibilities for children's civic engagement.

Growing sociological interest and attention to children and childhood in recent times has resulted

in a shift away from the influence of the individualistic doctrine of presociological theories (James *et al.*, 1998). Socialisation from a sociological perspective is seen as 'a process of appropriation, reinvention, and reproduction' in which 'children negotiate, share and create culture with adults and each other' (Corsaro, 2005, p. 18). Sociological understandings acknowledge children as agentic with 'social, political and economic status as contemporary subjects' (James *et al.*, 1998 p. 26), that is, as citizens of today. James *et al.* identified four major sociological theoretical models: the socially constructed child, the tribal child, the minority group child, and the social-structural child. Acknowledgment of children as competent and capable social actors, and the influence of social structures are common to each of these models, yet they are conceptualised in different ways.

The theoretical models of children as socially constructed and a minority group have greatest applicability to this paper. The idea of children as socially constructed draws from social constructionism in which taken-for-granted meanings are suspended (James *et al.*, 1998). For example, the concept of a universal child as proposed in each of the presociological theoretical models of children is not accepted. Instead, plurality and diversity are welcomed. In social constructionism, participation for children is understood to be influenced by context. Children construct meaning agentially through interactions with others, including peers and/or adults. Adults question, analyse, and reflect on the influence of social constructions of children's participation. Such a view of children enables identification of social structures that shape the possibilities for children's citizenship.

A theoretical model of children as a minority group recognises that children as a group are positioned as powerless, disadvantaged and oppressed (Oakley, 1994). This theoretical model draws from critical theory with theorists such as Giroux (1983) viewing the social demarcation of childhood as justifying ongoing adult domination of children. Children in this model are viewed as deserving the same rights as adults, yet they rarely receive these rights. Children's differences to adults are seen as imposed disadvantages. If children are viewed as a minority group their citizenship participation is recognised as limited and constrained by social constructions.

The United Nations General Assembly (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and its application in social policy have incited current interest in the

concept of children's citizenship, that is, the inclusion of children's participation in society. Contemporary social theory has positioned children as competent and capable of being citizens of today whereas pre-sociological views of children position them as not yet capable (James *et al.*, 1998). Recent support for children's participation however is typically high in rhetoric and low in practical application (Prout, 2002). Support for the actualisation of children's participation is troubled by discourses of children as evil and needing control, as innocent and requiring cocooning in private worlds, as impulsive and necessitating management, or as developing so that participation is oriented to the future. Further to this, embedded social structures and practices (e.g. children's limited access to civic institutions) exclude children's access to participation.

With the progressive widening between adulthood and childhood, social spaces for adults and children have become more demarcated. Child labour regulations and compulsory schooling from the beginning of the twentieth century saw schools as the social space demarcation for children, leaving workplaces for adults only. More recently with the increase in the number of women in the workforce, family friendly legislation and policies have led workplaces to begin to consider the practice of children visiting their parents'/ guardians' workplace. These shifts in social practices have led to the formation of 'children on campus' policies, yet historical discourses have shaped the positioning of children in some policies as the following analysis demonstrates.

## Analytical and conceptual frameworks

From a critical theory position, children are seen as shaped by historical and social forces (Hoy & McCarthy, 1994). This paper investigates how historical and social forces shape constructs of children, and through poststructuralist understandings (Derrida, 1993, 1996, 1997, 2008) proposes possibilities for welcoming plurality. 'Children on campus' policies from three universities were analysed through discourse analysis to identify meanings regarding the place and position of children at university campuses. One policy was from a regional university, the other two were metropol-

itan universities though located in different cities. This paper discusses this small yet cross spectrum sample to provide detailed readings of policies from differing contexts with differing positions ascribed to children and universities as social spaces. The policies were analysed according to the theory of discourse espoused by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and the methods proposed by Jorgensen and Phillips (2002). According to Laclau and Mouffe, discourse is understood as a 'structured totality resulting from articulatory practice' (p.105), that is, how a defined way of understanding and talking about the world is communicated. Discourse analysis involved firstly reading the policies to identify key signifiers, sites of fixed meaning that are so conventionalised that they are considered natural. Meaning of each signifier is determined by its relation to other

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signs, what Jorgensen and Phillips refer to as chains of equivalence. Discourses of children and childhood and how they shape the language and intent of the policies were then identified. On the basis of these readings, meanings for

identities of children and campuses as social spaces were made visible and the social consequences of one discourse hegemonically pinning down the meaning of a signifier explored.

## Research findings

Each 'children on campus' policy was read to identify key signifiers associated with children. The identification of other signifiers in each document determined meaning and identity assigned to children. Other key signifiers identified in policy one were protect/ion, health and safety, disturbance, disruption, and inconvenience. These words were identified as significant based on their frequency and direct association with children in the text.

There were six citations of 'protect' or 'protection' with the initial emphasis being 'to protect the study and work environment of others at the University, and to protect the University's assets and reputation' as stated in the purpose of the policy. There were thirteen references to 'health and safety' that indicated responsibility to the health and safety of children but also attention to the health and safety risks to others created by children being brought on campus. In three

places the policy stipulated provisions to reduce disturbance caused by children (e.g. 'the child does not cause significant disturbance to the integrity of the work or study environment'). 'Disruption' was also linked to children on campus five times, e.g. 'The workplace or class will not be unduly disrupted by the presence of the child'. The presence of children on campus was also associated with 'inconvenience' in conjunction with derivatives of 'disturb' or 'disrupt' bringing greater emphasis to a view that children will negatively impinge on work and study environments.

By reading the chains of equivalence between the above signifiers, it becomes apparent that children are ascribed an identity of being risky, disruptive, and an inconvenience and disturbance. Identification of these signifiers in this specific policy and their relation to one another position the university as a social space for adult work and study that requires protection from child disturbance, inconvenience and disruption. The above interpretation is suggestive of policy as one being shaped by discourses that view children as evil (or uncontrollable and destructive) and impulsive. The policy positions university campuses as spaces that privilege adult usage and an adult right to be free of child disturbances.

For policy two, a supporting document on the approval process was also included in the analysis. Identified key signifiers associated with children included health and safety, risk, disruption, and wilful damage. 'Health and safety' was referred to four times following from the policy guiding principle of ensuring 'the health and safety of all, including children'. Children are positioned as different from others, by stating explicitly that children are included in 'all'. 'Risk' was identified as a signifier in the contexts of supervisors being required to assess potential risks created by the presence of children on campus; and that children are not permitted to enter high risk areas.

Across the policy there were five mentions of 'disrupt' and derivatives signalling that the presence of children should not disrupt the work of others and work area. There were also two references to 'wilful damage' explaining litigation implications 'if a child is responsible for causing wilful damage'. By linking the chains of equivalence between these signifiers the identity of children is mapped as disruptive and destructive, and the social space of a university campus is depicted as requiring guarding against the disruption and destruction of children. Like policy one, policy two is suggestive of being shaped by discourses

that view children as evil and impulsive, and that privilege and guard university spaces as adult spaces not to be interfered by child disturbances.

In policy three the signifier of children is associated with signifiers of requests, care and responsibility. The term 'request' implies a space where both the parent or carer of a child and the university representative have agency, as opposed to the terms 'approval' and 'permission' employed in policies one and two that indicate that the power rests with the university representative alone. 'Care' was noted as significant because this policy (as different to policy one and two) acknowledged that 'care of children is not confined to the social and private realms of life'. In the other two policies emphasis was on the parent or carer being responsible for the care of the child. Meaning associated with 'responsibility' also differed in policy three. Emphasis is on acknowledgement of the demands of family responsibility, which may require staff and students to bring children on campus (e.g. 'family responsibility may be the concern of any adult').

In policies one and two responsibility is punitively assigned to parents and carers for the behaviour of a child on campus (e.g. the supervising adult is responsible for the behaviour and supervision of the child'). The chains of equivalence between identified signifiers in policy three map children as a group who may require care across a range of social contexts and domains, of which university campuses are one such context. The university campus is depicted as a social space where members have opportunity for voice and negotiation. Such identities and social spaces are indicative of discourses that welcome plurality and diversity. This way of understanding the world acknowledges that the care of children may occur across multiple and broad domains of life, and no one person is responsible for children.

## Discussion

From a critical theory position, children are seen as a minority group who are disadvantaged as citizens because they do not have the same rights as adults (see Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Oakley, 1994). James, Curtis, and Birch (2008) declare that children lack political rights but also many social and civic rights. Some of the civic rights that James *et al.* identified as being denied to children include: access to courts, avenues to challenge decisions that have been made on their behalf, decision-making about their education, and a formal

voice in society. Young children have no formal avenues for their opinions to be heard by civic institutions (Kulnych, 2001; Lister, 2007). The above policy documents demonstrate that the presence of children on university campuses discriminates against children as a minority group and sees conditions applied to the civic right of access to a public space, based on a view of university campuses as public spaces and sites of citizenship. Special permission needs to be sought for children to be on campus and children are largely positioned from a deficit view. The meanings associated with children in policy one and two suggest that children are uncontrollable and impulsive, and that university campuses need to be guarded from such behaviour.

Citizenship and democracy are inextricably linked. Derrida (1997) proposed that democracy could occur if others' secrets were respected. To Derrida (1993), the secret is the individual experience. In some ways then it is the right to say anything, yet the secret never allows itself to be captured, revealed or covered over by the relation to the other (Derrida, 1993). Instead the individual tells her or his own secret, which does not answer to others or need to correspond to others (Derrida, 1993, 2008). The secret is synonymous with the private world of individuals, for as Derrida (1996) declares, 'the secret remains inaccessible and heterogeneous to the public realm' (p. 83). With the public realm being largely a space for universalism, secrets do not fit or are not welcome. Public policies and practices produced from discourses built on universalism disregard the diversity of the secret. Respect for others' secrets involves infinite responsibility for the other and ethical conduct with regard for others. Policy one and two do not convey such respect, responsibility or ethical conduct toward children. To Derrida (1997), when differences or secrets are respected, democracy occurs.

A democratic relationship with the other to Derrida is an experience of openness, where respect for the secrets (or singularity) of the Other is practised. Policy one and two are not suggestive of democracy as openness that Derrida describes, as they do not respect the singularity of experience of being a child, but instead project universal views of children. The common prescribed practice for Australian universities of permis-

sion for children to enter a university campus being required also opposes the Derridian view of democracy as openness. Interestingly, 'children on campus' policies are not commonplace in the US. To Derrida (1996) conventions, regulations, rules and institutions stabilise chaos or potential chaos and control or block the flow of possibilities for democracy as openness. On the basis of this understanding, 'children on campus' policies act as stabilisers to the fear of chaos cultivated through discourses of children as uncontrollable and impulsive. Possibilities for children to be citizens in the public sphere of campus life is then blocked or limited. Children's rights to participation on university campuses are infringed.

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and framed by legislation that states that the responsibility for all persons on campus resides with the university. Such responsibilities can still be addressed in a way that presents a respectful view of children, honours children's rights to participation and does

not discriminate against staff and students who are responsible for the care of children as demonstrated in policy three. Policies one and two project universal views of children as uncontrollable and impulsive. The voice of children has not been included in the formation of these policies. The singularity of experience, or what Derrida (1993) refers to, as the secret has not been considered. There are many ways children can experience and contribute to campus life. Some children at times may be impulsive and express themselves in dynamic ways. These ways of being are another way of being that can bring joy, wonder, delight, laughter and alternative understandings. Such as the suggestion offered by one of my children when I shared with them that I needed to seek permission for them to enter the campus: 'Do you think we could get away with being midget adults?' Deficit views of children as causing disturbance, disruption or inconvenience block and deny opportunities for children to be active citizens and contribute to universities as democratic sites.

In addition, the above readings of 'children on campus' policies make visible the irony at play for academic departments that conduct research with



children espousing the rhetoric of children as active citizens. Children are not welcomed on university campuses; conditions apply. It is hoped that this paper draws attention to the deficit view of children portrayed in many 'children on campus' policies and cultivates dialogue and action at Australian universities to produce policies and practices that welcome children's participation on university campuses as citizens. To reform Australian university policies and practices regarding children on campus requires a shift away from seeing children as dangerous, to a welcoming of the different ways of being and understanding children can bring to academic life.

**Louise Phillips is a lecturer in early childhood and literacy education at University of Southern Queensland.**

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